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PARSHAS BAMIDBAR



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR

SHIUR PRESENTED IN 5777

WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF AMEILUS IN TORAH?

Since the Torah on Har Sinai required a *kabalas haTorah*, it's important for us to think about whether we are ready for a *kabalas haTorah*. Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes that *kabalas haTorah* is not something you do once a year. You should do it every time you learn. A person should be *mekabel Torah* before he learns. He should think to himself, *Na'aseh v'nishma*.

Shavuos was the day that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the Torah, and that was the day that *kabalas haTorah* began. So we need to address some important questions about why *kabalas haTorah* is necessary. Even if a person knows that he needs to observe the Torah, one of the big questions that everybody struggles with is the *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah*. People want to know, "Why is it so important to learn Torah?" People want to know, "Why is *ameilus baTorah* so important? What's the benefit from it?" Why is it so important?"

TORAH ENABLES US TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HASHEM

So, the first thing you have to know is why Torah is important. Now, these are questions you will be asked in your life, or you may ask them yourself, or your children might ask, "Why is Torah so important?" And the answer is that Torah is important because the goal of our existence, as the Ramchal explains it, is to develop a relationship and a *kurvah* (closeness) to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Now, having a union and relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't come automatically.

People think they could have a relationship with Hashem through *chassidus*. Some people think they can have a relationship with Hashem through *kabbalah*. Some people think they can have a relationship with Hashem through singing, through *neginah*. Especially since they were told that *sha'arei neginah* is the highest of the highest *sha'ar* in the *heichal*. They go for that nonsense. Anything to get out of *ameilus baTorah*. There's no *shaylah* about it that people who sing are definitely in the highest of the highest places. But I don't think it's in *shamayim*. Something tells me this, but hopefully I'm wrong. You know what they have to know? The Ramchal says the only way to create and have a relationship with Hashem is through *kiyum hamitzvos*. That's the only way you could have a union, a connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Otherwise, it's not *shayach*. You know how important that is? You have to remind yourself all the time that, "My goal is to have a *kurvah*." And you tell your children this - that's the only way it's going to work. "Why can't we do this Tatty? Why can't we do that Tatty?" And you'll say, "Because the *kurvah* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu happens *al yedei Torah* and *mitzvos*."¹

WHY IS TORAH THE SPECIAL TOOL?

So then a person says, "Okay. That's what the Ramchal says. He was a kabbalist. He was a philosopher. He was a big *oveid Hashem*. He was a big *talmid chacham*. He was a master of many trades. And if he says the way to do it is through *mitzvos*, he must know what he's talking about. But who says it has to be Torah? And who says it has to be *ameilus baTorah*. And how does it have to be *ameilus baTorah*?"

¹ ואמנם אמצעי א' נתן לנו הקל ית' שמדריגתו למעלה מכל שאר האמצעיים המקרבים האדם אליו והוא תלמוד תורה והוא בב' בחינות. הא' בחינת ההגיון והלימוד והב' בחינת ההשכל, וכו'. (דרך ה', חלק ראשון, במצב האדם בעולם הזה)

TALMUD TORAH KENEGED KULAM

The first thing you have to know is that *talmud Torah* is *keneged kulam*. If *talmud Torah* is the greatest of all *mitzvos*, that's the greatest way to get a *kurvah* to the Ribono Shel Olam. If *mitzvos* are the secret to that *kurvah*, and the Torah is the biggest of all the *mitzvos*, it follows that Torah is the greatest *kurvah*. If you're not getting that *kurvah*, you know what you know? You know something very clear. If you're not getting that *kurvah* out of Torah, and Torah is turning you off, you're evidently not learning Torah. You may be sitting here, and you may have a *gemara* in front of you, maybe a lot of *gemaros* in front of you, but if you don't feel that *kurvah*, you're not learning Torah. And you have to push yourself to figure out, "How am I going to learn Torah? What am I doing wrong?"

TORAH GIVES AWARENESS AND SENSITIVITY

Now many people think, "But I don't like Torah." So the answer to that is they have to know that when they say they "don't like to," what does that mean? Does that mean: "I, Yisroel Brog, the Jew - my *neshamah* does not like to?" Do I not want to have a *kurvah* with Hakadosh Baruch Hu? Everybody has to acknowledge that his *neshamah*, והנפש, לא תמלא, the *neshamah* wants to have a *kurvah* to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. What's the problem? That a person also has a *guf* and his *guf* is interested in fun. His *guf* likes to rest. His *guf* likes easy things. And his *guf* gives him quick fixes. And because of that, his *guf* doesn't allow him to enjoy Torah. You need to develop your *neshamah*. You need to develop a relationship with your own *neshamah*, an awareness first of all, and a connection second of all. Just telling a person that he has a *neshamah* doesn't mean he has a connection to his *neshamah*. He's connected to his *guf*. He's connected to his *kishkes*. So first you need to have the awareness, and the connection to your *neshama* - and then you feel *mitzvos*. You can then be *margish mitzvos*. You can be *margish* Torah.

Now, Rav Chaim Volozhiner says, Torah requires a *kabbalah*. So every time before you learn Torah, you have to train yourself to be *mechazek* your *kabalas haTorah*. You have to say to yourself as follows: הני מוכן ומזומן לקיים, "I am ready and prepared to fulfill the biggest *mitzvah* in the Torah, which is the best way to get close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Whether I understand it or not, whether or not I can figure out how - I can get closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu by discussing *mechitzos* between yards, digging ditches next to another guy's field, planting trees, which seem like very mundane things. Whether or not I understand how it works to make me get close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, it's irrelevant. This is Torah, and anybody who learns Torah and thinks about the fact that he's doing a *mitzvah* of Torah will feel it."

TORAH GIVES ITS SECRETS TO THOSE WHO TOIL

Now people say, "But I don't feel it." And the answer to why you don't feel, is because Torah has its own personality. You know what Torah is? Torah is called *Toras chaim*. You know what *Toras chaim* means? Living Torah. What does that mean, a living Torah? What's a dead Torah, and what's a living Torah? It doesn't say *tefillin* is *tefillin chaim*. It doesn't say *tzitzis* is *tzitzis chaim*. When you do a *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, *tzitzis* itself doesn't have any relationship with you. But Torah does. Torah has its own personality. It's its own *neshamah*. It's a living entity. It may not have feet like you have. It may not have eyes. But the Torah is a living entity, and the *gemara* says in *Sanhedrin* (99b) clearly that the Torah gives its secrets to those who are willing to put forth an effort.²

If somebody says, "I have to put forth an effort to derive *vus shtait* in the Torah," the Torah says, "I will give that individual my secrets." But if you don't think Torah is worth making an effort, you're not going to get it.

² רבי יהושע בן קרחה אומר כל הלומד תורה ואינו חוזר עליה דומה לאדם שזורע ואינו קוצר רבי יהושע אומר כל הלומד תורה ומשכחה דומה לאשה שיולדת וקוברת. רבי עקיבא אומר זמר בכל יום זמר בכל יום אחר רבי יצחק בר אבדימי מאי קרא שנאמר (משלי טז, כ) נפש עמל עמלה לו כי אכף עליו פיהו הוא עמל במקום זה ותורתו עומלת לו במקום אחר (רש"י ד"ה זמר בכל יום - היה מסדר למודך אע"פ שסדור בפ"ך כזמר והוא יגרום לך שתהא לעולם הבא בשמחה ובשרים, רש"י ד"ה נפש עמל עמלה לו - מפני שעמל בתורה תורה עומלת לו)

LACK OF EMUNAH BRINGS FOOLISHNESS

There's a *noradige Chazal* (Pesikta Zutrasa, Vayechi)³ that says: מי גרם לישראל, what caused Klal Yisrael, or what causes Klal Yisrael, שיהיו מטופשים, that they should become *tipshim* (fools)? You know what it says? You know what causes Klal Yisrael to become fools? One thing: שלא האמינו בתורה, they had no *emunah* in the Torah. They had no faith. לא ניתנה תורה לטפשים, "Torah was not given to fools." You know what that means? It means that in order for Klal Yisrael to be *mekabel* the Torah they had to have *emunah* in the Torah, because if you don't have *emunah* you don't get Torah. To get Torah you have to believe in Torah. You can't be *zocheh* to know Torah, to feel a connection with Torah without *emunah*. You have to believe in it. It's not similar to another *chachmah*. It's not like reading a math book. It's not like studying how to fix cars or how to build houses. It's a different kind of *chachmah*. This *chachmah* requires you to believe in it.

Now, when a person believes in something, you know what he does? He puts forth effort. For something that I believe is important, I will put forth effort. For something that I don't believe is important, I don't put forth effort. Now, sometimes, I put forth effort even if I don't like to. Of course, it's easier for the guy who likes building things to put forth tremendous toil and exertion to build things because he enjoys it. Of course, if you enjoy something, you're going to put forth effort. Have you ever seen people running down the block early in the morning? How do they do it every single day? Don't they get tired? No. You know why? Some people like to run. You know why they like to run? It's to get their endorphins going. It's called runner's high. That's what happens; they feel that high, and they enjoy it, so they run. That's what it is.

With Torah - you have to invest in it. You have to be willing to put forth the effort. The Rambam writes in his *hakdamah* to *Mishnayos Zerayim*, about the *moradige koach* of *Torah sheba'al peh*. People think that the *ma'aleh* of Torah is minimal and it doesn't do much for a person. He says it's not true. It develops a whole *mentsch*. It makes a person understand anything and everything in every area of his life. Torah opens a person's mind. You take a look at a guy who doesn't have Torah, he's a pauper. The guy talks to other paupers all day long, so he thinks he's smart. It's amazing to me!

Now a person has to be *meshtadel*. The Rambam says you have to be *meshtadel*. It's very important. A person has to be willing to be *matriach*. *Ameilus* is the measuring stick. If you're willing to be *matriach* yourself that shows you believe this thing could be important. It shows, "I have an interest." Of course, after you develop an interest and you develop a joy, for the person who has a developed interest it's going to be much easier. He broke through the barrier already - of lack of interest.

HOW TO NAP LIKE A BEN TORAH

The guy who is pursuing *olam hazeh*, could have a hard time developing his *chachmah*. I remember there was a *rosh yeshivah* who called me up. I was trying to get a *bachur* into his *yeshivah*. He tells me, "Does this *bachur* take naps?" I said, "Does the *bachur* take naps?! When? During the week? I thought most *bachurim* take naps." He said, "A *bachur* doesn't take a nap." I said, "In your *yeshivah* no one takes naps?! They *pashut* learn all day?! No one takes naps?!"

He said, "Let me explain to you what I mean." He said, "There are two kinds of naps. There is a nap, a Shabbosdike nap. For his Shabbos nap, the guy gets undressed like he's getting ready for a long trip, gets into his pajamas if he wears pajamas and tells the world, 'Goodbye. I don't exist anymore. You don't exist anymore. Sayonara!' That's what they say. Goodbye!"

He said, "And then there's a nap where a guy is resting in order to rejuvenate his *kochos*. Does this guy take a nap by lunch, gets his clothes off and goes into bed? If

³כמובא בס' אמרי דעת: "לא ניתנה תורה לטיפשין. מי גרם

he does, he's *mufka* from Torah," he told me. "I don't want to talk to *aza bachur* who is so *mufka*." A person like that is just out. He's not *davening minchah*. He's not learning second *sefer*. He's *mufka*, that's it. He's out!

When you go for a nap, you lay down to rest. You lay down on top of the bed. It's *mikreh*. It's not saying "goodbye" to the world.

KABALAS HATORAH: HOW TO STAY CONNECTED

A person has to understand that this is what the goal is. The goal has to be for a person to invest and have an interest into trying to stay connected with Torah. He has to understand that he has to make that breakthrough. A guy who is an *emese ben Torah* can afford to relax a little more. You know why? He already enjoys doing this (i.e. learning). But if you don't enjoy doing it yet, if you're still struggling with the enjoyment, you've got to make that basic breakthrough. You don't take vacation before you get anywhere in the "course." This "course" is called: "Do you relate to the Torah yet? Do you have any *chashivus* for the Torah? Do you have any *emunah* in the *chashivus* of Torah? Do you have any understanding in the *toeles* of the Torah?" That's *kabalas haTorah*.

Here is a *bachur* who just called me up from Eretz Yisrael. He's learning *Perek Hashutfin*. I told him, "Where are you holding?" He said, "*Lefichach*." I said, "Tosfos, *lefishach*. How long did you spend on that?" He said, "The *kollel* spent a little over two weeks every day pounding that Tosfos." He said, "I'm going nuts."

A person has to understand that he can't learn Torah without putting forth effort. It's not *shayach*. Now, not everybody can put in the same effort. Some people have the capability of putting in more effort than others, depending on where they're holding on the ladder. A baby in second grade could put forth only so much effort. A guy in sixth grade - more. A guy in tenth grade - more. A guy in twelfth grade - even more. But as you mature, you're supposed to put forth more effort, being able to and willing. A person has to gauge whether he is willing to put forth effort for Torah, or he just likes it to come easy? Are you one of those guys who rationalize, "Oh, for other people, it comes easy to them. They don't have any challenges." It's not like that.

Kabalas haTorah means, "Hashem, I've come to appreciate that if I don't have Torah, if I was never given the Torah, I would never accomplish anything. I would never have that relationship with You, Hashem, that I would require for my perfection." To graduate life, you have to have a relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and the highest means is through the Torah. The *ameilus baTorah* is a *siman*, is a measuring stick, of how much appreciation, how much *emunah*, how much *simchah* you have for the *zach*. When you have no *emunah* you have no *chashivus*, and you're not putting forth any effort. Shavuos for you is not going to be happy. But you've got ten days left until Shavuos. You've got ten days left. Let's get started. Think about these rules of the Torah and you can still develop some tools to help you make a real *kabalas haTorah*.

Now another thing the *yetzer hara* tells a person is that, "I can get away without *ameilus baTorah*." Now what's the answer to that? "Some people are made for *bekius*," they say. Is that true? The mitzvah of בתורה עמלים was only for certain people? Now, I'm not going to tell you that everybody could be *amal baTorah* all day all night. I didn't say that. But everybody has to be *amal* and put forth an effort to learn, to understand the learning.

WHAT DOES HASHEM WANT FROM YOU?

In last week's *parshah*, *Bechukosai*, it says as follows: ואם לא תשמעו לי, if you won't listen to My *mitzvos*, ולא תעשו את כל המצות האלה, and you won't do all of these *mitzvos* (Vayikra 26:14). Now, this is a very strange *passuk* at first glance. If you won't listen to Me and you're not going to do all the *mitzvos* – what does that mean? So Rashi says, what is the meaning of אם לא תשמעו לי? Rashi says, you know what that means אם לא תשמעו לי?

If you won't commit yourself to *ameilus baTorah*. If you're not willing to commit yourself to making an effort to understand Torah. You gave up already. You're not interested. You're not willing to put forth an effort to learn Torah. You know what that's a *siman* of, *zugt* Rashi? That if a person is *lo lamad*, the next stage is *lo asah*.⁴ A person who is not willing to exert himself to understand Torah, has no interest in *asiyas hamitzvos*. That's what it says ולא תעשו ולא תשמעו. You know why? Because the *ikar* purpose of *ameilus* is to really understand what is truly being said. You want to reach the point where you ask yourself: "What does Hashem want me to do?" To try to be *mechadesh* in how you do a *mitzvah*, to come up with something. *Lefi zeh* I could extrapolate, this is what Hashem wants me to do.

It says, if a person is not going to be *amal baTorah*, you have to know the next step is - *lo asah*. It means, if you're not willing to invest in this *mitzvah* of learning Torah which is the key to understanding all the *mitzvos*. The same guy who can't be *amal baTorah* can't learn *Mishnah Berurah* too. He has a problem with the *Mishnah Berurah* and the *Be'er Halachah*. It becomes too hard for him.

Now, לא תשמעו לי. Rashi says, what does that mean *li*. Rashi says את המכיר את הבורא, ומתכוון למרוד בו, ומתכוון למרוד בו *makir* his Creator, and he intends to rebel against Him. That's a *pelah*. There is such a *briah* of a person who is *makir*. He has no *safeik* that there is a Ribono Shel Olam. And he's מתכוון למרוד בו. You know why? Because he has no interest to know the *mitzvos*. He doesn't want to know exactly what Hashem wants him to do.⁵

KNOWING WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

Here is a fellow who puts on *tefillin*, but he puts his *tefillin* on his forehead, incorrectly. You ask him, "Why do you put it on your forehead? Is that how you were taught?" What's the answer? Why do people put it on their foreheads? Do you know? Why do you think people who wear their *tefillin* on their foreheads do it? You think it's because it says you should place the *tefillin* "between your eyes"? No. The *gemara* says there were Tzedukim like that, but that's not why people do it today. You know why people do it? They don't even think about אפילו בין עיניך. They are that clueless! They say, "It's comfortable. It fits." When you put on *tefillin* for the first time on people, they always say, "They're falling off. They're not going to stick this way." The guy thinks that the *tefillin*'s going to go flying off his head. If he pushes it down and the *tefillin* gets lodged on his forehead, now *that* feels like he's doing it properly. But it's not so. You've got to put the back knot by the top of that bone called the occipital bone and you've got to put the *tefillin* on the top of your head going up at the place where your head gets softer, called the fontanelle.

So a guy just asked me, "Does that mean for twenty-two years I never wore *tefillin*?" I said, "If you put *tefillin* on this way every single day, maybe you were *mekayem mitzvas tefillin* sometimes. Because when you put the *tefillin* on, you started with them up here and then you pulled them down. So until they got down, you were *yotzei the mitzvah*, maybe." He said, "Do I get anything for the *hishtadlus*? For the trying." I said, "You get something for trying, but Hashem is going to ask you, 'Why didn't you find out the right way to do it?' The answer is, I didn't care less if it was the right way." I said, "When you wear your shirt, do you button the top button and skip to the third or leave a couple of buttons open? No. Why? Because it's not the right way. For that, you found out the right way. Do you button your sleeve to the front of your shirt? No. How come? It's not the right way." People do everything the right way, except when it comes to what Hashem wants. You have to do what Hashem wants the right way. And if you don't care, it means to say you don't care about anything. Ai, the person says, "I do *mitzvos*." It's not because

⁴ ולא תעשו. משלא תלמדו לא תעשו. הרי שתי עברות

⁵ ואם לא תשמעו לי. להיות עמלים בתורה, לדעת מדרש חכמים. יכול לקיים המצוות? כשהוא אומר ולא תעשו וגו' הרי קיים מצוות אמור, הא מה אני מקיים ואם לא תשמעו לי? להיות עמלים בתורה, ומה ת"ל לי? אין לי אלא זה המכיר את רבונו ומכון למרד בו, וכן בנמרוד גבור ציד לפני ה" (בראשית י"י), שמכירו ומתכונ למרד בו, וכן באנשי סדום "רעים וחסדים לה' מאד" (שם י"ג), מכירים את רבונו ומתכוננים למרד בו

you care. You do them because it doesn't bother you. That's why you do them. That's the only reason.

PICKING MITZVOS BY HOW MUCH EFFORT IS REQUIRED

Here is a person who eats on Shabbos. Does it have anything to do with Hashem? No. He likes *chulent*. He eats when he wants. He eats how he wants. It's a *mitzvah*? It's a good thing it's a *mitzvah*. "Hashem is lucky. Now I'll do what He wants." But he doesn't care *bechlal*.

How many people skip *seudah shlishis*? It's brought down that you shouldn't stuff yourself at the first meal, so you should have an appetite. But people have *kiddush*, where they eat like *seudas Shlomo besh'a'ato*. Then they have the main meal at home, a second *seudas Shlomo besh'a'ato* - so is it any wonder why they don't have room left for *seudah shlishis*?

It's very important to know - we have to put in effort. The relationship you get with Hashem is not through this automatic performance of *mitzvos*. It's by putting in an effort into doing the will of Hashem. You're not building a strong relationship with a *mitzvah* you don't struggle with. If you have a friend, and you give him a smile and a shake of your head, that's not going to build a major relationship with him. But if you put in effort, you exert yourself, and put yourself forward, that can do something. A person needs to understand that this is the importance of putting in an effort.

Now Rashi is telling us that when you see a person, who is not toiling in Torah and doesn't want to toil in Torah, you're seeing a person who is not willing to exert himself in any area to do the will of Hashem. Sometimes you see a person who is *medakdek* in certain *mitzvos*. You see the *dikduk*. He has a *meshugas* in certain *mitzvos* that are *kadosh* to him. *Meshugasim*. That has nothing to do with the will of Hashem. It's his own hang-up. He's not doing the will of Hashem.

NO TOIL, NO DO, NO HONOR, NO BELIEVE

So, once a person is not willing to put the effort into toiling in learning, that person is not interested in *asiyas mitzvos*. Then Rashi goes on to say there's a next step. You know what the next step is? If you don't like to learn, you're going to detest others who are *medakdek* in *mitzvos*. You'll call them *frumacks*, *frummies*. You're going to be *mo'eis be'acheirim*.

It also makes no sense. Why should you care if somebody else is doing *mitzvos*? That guy wants to put the effort in. That guy wants to do the right thing. You should have respect for him. No. You can't take it. *Chazal say*, you're *mamash* מואס באחרים העושים.

I see this with a lot of guys who start to go by the wayside. When their learning stops, you know what they do? The first thing they do is they make fun of other people who learn. It's junky. It's all not serious. They're not *tzaddikim*. These guys with big *peyos* think of themselves as who knows what. You put down other people doing *mitzvos*. They *pashut* can't take it. It *pashut* eats them up. And the next thing they do is, they're *sonei chachamim*. You see, in the previous stage, you know what they say? *Chachamim* are different. But then they get to the *madreigah* that they're *sonei chachamim*. You hate *rabbanim*. I used to ask people, "Do you have respect for *rabbanim*?" I used to always ask them this question. "Do you have respect for all *rabbanim*?" "*Rabbanim*? They're all a bunch of fakers." You know what I knew then? I knew exactly where they were holding in the world. Because I knew they already were *lo lamad*. They were already holding by *lo asah*. They were already עושים באחרים מואס, and they were *sonei chachamim*. You know what the next step is? What they do is, they're *moneia* others from doing *mitzvos*. They prevent others from doing *mitzvos*. That's *mamash* an unbelievable thing. And you know what the next thing is? They deny that Hashem made this *mitzvah*. They say, "I don't believe that Hashem made such a *mitzvah*. I just don't believe it."

You have a guy doing *borer* on Shabbos. The guy is picking out whatever he's picking out. You say, "That's *borer*. That's one of the thirty-nine *melachos* of Shabbos." He says, "I don't believe for one second Hashem cares about how I pick my salad out or how I pick my soup out. Give me a break. Who made that up? Some *rabbanim*? What was he doing? Trying to sell something?"

They reject all the *mitzvos* and they're *mezalzel* in *mitzvos*. They deny. They say, "Ah, it's a whole bunch of *chumros*. The *rabbanim* made up these stories to make life hard for us." And on and on.

THE SWEET BUZZ OF TORAH

Do you know what the *eitzah* for all this is? There is one simple *eitzah*. If you meet a modern guy who is a *kofer*, a guy who is already *sonei chachamim*, the *eitzah* is not to get into a fight with him and tell him that *chachamim* are *chashuv*. *Rabbanim* are great. No. There's one *eitzah*. "Come, let's learn something. Let me learn something with you. Let's get into something. Take apart a *gemara*. Say, you're a smart fellow, right?" I always used to ask them this question. "Do you consider yourself of average intelligence, below average, above average, or very above?" I can't tell you how many people tell me, "I'm definitely above average." Very few told me they're average. The only *shaylah* was, when they told me they're 'above average' whether they meant to say they were 'way above average.' I've met a number of people who have told me, "What should I do? Most people are stupid next to me." I say, "Who told you that? Your mother? I mean, who told you that? What are you known for? *Meheicha teisi* you're like that?" Imagination. They convince themselves that they're like that. So the best thing to do is to say, "You're a smart fellow. Let's learn a little." Just like that.

I remember talking to a young fellow who thought he was a genius. He told me he's going to bring me down. He said, "I heard you made some other people *frum*. You sold them a bill of goods." He said, "You know why? They had no brains. But I'm going to be your demise. You met your match now." He tells me, "I'm going to listen to everything you say. I'm going to write it down and put it on a computer. I'm going to make myself a whole file on you, and one by one, I'm going to take you apart." He says, "I'm going to chew you up and spit you out." I told him, "You know, you're getting me excited. You're getting me excited, my friend. I love a good challenge. But I would say to you like this. I would suggest you act a little humbly, because there's a possibility you may end up with an egg on your face. I know you think you're smart, but I've got some surprises for you."

I'll never forget, after spending a couple of months with this guy, I finally decided, here's the challenge. I said, "I'm going to teach you a *mishnah* in *mesechta Makkos*. I'm going to teach you all the tricks." I said, "If you were trying to prepare the *mishnah* on your own, it ain't going to work because Torah is a living Torah. I know you don't believe it but trust me. Try it your way. Treat it like a dead Torah, and not one sentence is going to go in your head." I said, "Give it respect. First wash your hands before you learn Torah. Let me show what the blessing is that you make beforehand. Give it the respect it deserves. I'm telling you, it will help you out. As much as I'm going to try to give it to you, it's not easy." I said, "Now we're going to learn this *mishnah*. I'm going to teach it to you first. Bring a tape recorder. I'm going to teach you on the tape what each word means. And you're a lawyer. We're talking in an area of law now. We're not talking about kabbalah," I told him. "No kabbalah here. You understand? We're not either talking about *kadshim*, about sacrifices."

He brought the *gemora* and I said, "There are five questions that stand in your face. Now, I'm giving you the rules now. Everything is exact. Every statement here is *meduyak*. Tell me five questions that will demonstrate that this *mishnah* makes no sense. Show me your ability to analyze."

I said, "Now, I'm going to tell you another secret. After you do that prep, you *davened*, you washed your hands, you're wearing a yarmulke, you're giving it respect, the next thing is, you can buy yourself an Artscroll." The first Artscroll *gemara* that came out, if I remember correctly, was *Makkos*. It had just come out. That's why I picked *Makkos* for him. I said, "Go get yourself one of those and cheat your *kishkes* off. Look in the notes. Look in English. Look in the commentary. I'll meet you again after the weekend. If by Sunday you have five questions for me, please call me up. I'm going to be very excited to hear from you."

Now, this guy was a who's who in law school, and he became a *macher shebemachers* in law school. He was a very hot shot. He was a pretty smart guy. And he spent his weekend trying to challenge me. Then Hashem gave me *nachas*. Ah! The guy came. He called me up Sunday. He said, "I think I have a couple of questions."

I remember telling him. I said, "My friend, I'm talking about English sentences. If I would tell you the following, 'If a person does x he gets bafushticks,' what would you say the the obvious question is? If you would say, 'I don't know.' You know what that shows me? You're dumber than dumb. You would win the trophy for dumbness because the obvious question is, 'What is bafushticks?' That is the obvious question. If you ask me, 'Why bafushticks?' if you would do that, you know what I would know? You're even dumber than I thought you were in the first place - because you don't know what bafushticks is. I'm telling you, obvious questions, because it's a living Torah." The guy *pashut shvitzed*.

Then I told him, "Now, watch. I'm going to show you questions that show how the sentence doesn't make sense." And I showed him one. Then I showed him two. And I showed him three. I said, "Do you want more? Have you learned your lesson yet?" I said, "I'm not finished with you. I have two extra credit questions for you that I was going to offer you, but we didn't get to first base, so we can't work on extra credit." I told the guy, "You know what I just proved to you? I just proved to you something. Either you have to acknowledge to me that you're not as smart as you thought, or I just proved to you the holiness of the Torah, and the Torah will not stick to you. You can't even grasp it in English. I just proved to you that Torah is a *Toras chaim*. Now you can start to learn like a *mentsch*. Now you can commit yourself. You think you're smart? You're not smart. You think you're wise? You're otherwise, my friend. The only *shaychus* you have with wise is 'otherwise.'"

That's what a person has to know when it comes to Torah. He was humbled. But he became a *ben Torah* from that. He became a serious *ben Torah*. He became somebody who exerted himself and toiled in Torah like nobody's business because he saw what it was. He even enjoyed it.

He was going back home to his city. He said he was going to meet his friends and tell them about his newfound hobby in life, learning *gemara*. He said, "You know, I'm going to get creamed. I'm going straight from the airport to a bar. About thirty guys are going to be there. They're going to drill me." He said, "Let's play devil's advocate. What are you doing these days? Why are you doing this?" All the questions back and forth. Finally I said, "Hold on," I said. "Tell me something. What *do* you do it for? Why *do* you come here to learn? Between me and you and the lamppost, why do you come here?" He stopped to think and he said, "The buzz." I said, "The what?" He said, "The buzz." He said, "This feels like nothing else. I've done everything." He said, "I've tried everything. This definitely gives me a buzz." I said, "Do you feel the buzz? That's why you keep coming back?" This guy was an active motorcyclist. This guy was a major player... High flying, a skier, a runner. *Mamash* he had a life. He pulled up to my house on a motorcycle. That's how he lived. He was very smart. I said, "You get buzzed from *gemara*? From *Makkos* you get buzzed? My friend, you were *zocheh*. You were *zocheh*. You got a taste."

This is your whole foundation for all your belief in Hashem. You can't have a *shaychus* to Hashem without that. You've got to have that *shaychus* to Hashem.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu should help us strengthen ourselves. And think about this. Give it thought. If you're *mekabel* Torah on Shavuos, maybe you'll feel the buzz.

IN SUMMARY

The only way to establish and maintain a relationship with Hashem is through *kiyum hamitzvos* and *limud* HaTorah, and specifically through *ameilus* baTorah, according to Ramchal. If a person is not *amal b'Torah*, as Rashi tells us, he'll come to a point of *לא תעשו* the next step, and will even rebel against Hashem in the end, r"l. Learning Torah is the greatest instrument we possess for developing a *kurvah* to Hashem. If one is learning Torah but doesn't feel this *kurvah*, this connection to Hashem, it means he's not learning Torah properly. Developing awareness of our *neshama* and feeling of connection to it (as opposed to our *guf*) enables us to feel mitzvot and Torah. If I prepare myself properly before I learn Torah and understand that I am about to engage in doing the greatest mitzvah there is - the mitzvah that has the greatest potential of *kurvah* to Hashem - then I will feel that connection. The *chochma* of the Torah is fundamentally different from any other endeavor, and therefore, we are required to have *emunah* in Torah - because if we truly believe in it, then we'll put in the time and effort to acquire it! The benefits of making that emotional connection to Torah and deepening our interest and investment in it are simply beyond incredible because, as Rambam explains, the Torah opens up a person's mind and makes him understand every single area of his life. However, to stay connected with the Torah and to make this breakthrough that so many people crave for, we need to start enjoying our learning and continue to develop the *emunah* in the *chashivus* and *toeles* of the Torah. That's what *kabalas HaTorah* is! Fundamentally, *kabalas* HaTorah means developing a feeling that, if I don't have the Torah, I would never accomplish anything and I would never have a relationship with Hashem that is required for my perfection. We must understand and accept that the highest level of having a relationship with Hashem is through Torah, and *ameilus* in Torah is the "measuring stick" of how much of that *emunah*, *chashivus* and the sense of *simchah* we must have for Torah! In the remaining days before Shavuos, I will (bli neder) think about these ideas before I sit down to learn, specifically contemplating that "I am about to engage in the greatest mitzvah that brings a Yid closer to Hashem Yisborach." And in that *zechus*, iy"H, my Shavuos and my own *kabalas HaTorah* this year will be that much more special and palpable.

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